



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

January 29, 2020

Colonel Andrew Kelly
District Commander – Jacksonville District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
701 San Marco Blvd.
Jacksonville, FL 32207

Subject: Western Everglades Restoration Project Planning

Dear Colonel Kelly:

Thank you for your letter dated December 17, 2019 requesting our perspective on the Western Everglades Restoration Project (WERP). As you are aware from our discussions together, the South Florida Water Management District (District) remains fully committed to the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and this project. WERP is too important to the Everglades and to the people of the region to terminate. In fact, the rehydration of the western Everglades was envisioned as part of CERP and is a crucial part of Everglades restoration. The District is committed to completing the planning of WERP based on Alternative H.

Our dedicated WERP team will work closely together on the selected alternative and pay special attention to the water quality and real estate opportunities as they collaborate. There is no doubt that we can find solutions that will benefit public stakeholders and the overall project. As the non-Federal sponsor for Everglades restoration, the District is committed to fulfilling its obligations on these matters to the people of the region and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as our partner in restoration. The District recognizes its duty to provide lands, easements and rights of way as defined in the Master Agreement and believes there are opportunities for creative problem solving when it comes to this requirement. The District suggests use of flowage easements for private or Tribal land within the Big Cypress National Preserve and along Tamiami Trail instead of fee simple interest. This choice could allow the project to move forward without severely impacting landowners within that region.

As a show of good faith and our dedication to the project, the District proposes to move forward with collecting essential survey data in the Big Cypress National Preserve and along Tamiami Trail. LiDAR data was collected early on in project planning, however ground truthing is now needed to verify elevations in the western Everglades region. Additional data will allow the project team to evaluate and communicate how the project

might impact Tribal and private landowners within WERP footprint. District staff will be able to proceed with stakeholder coordination and data collection as soon as USACE concurrence is received.

Thank you for the opportunity to reaffirm the District's commitment to the WERP and provide feedback on its continuance. I value our partnership in Everglades restoration and look forward to advancing this critical restoration project in the western Everglades.

Sincerely,



Drew Bartlett
Executive Director

DB/mj